



Housing Cooperatives In Barcelona, Between The Commons And Social Production Of Habitat: A Step Towards Housing Communalization In Barcelona?

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Abstract

The cooperative housing *model of cession of use* (MCU) promoted by activist groups in Barcelona can be considered a means of reappropriation of housing and territory. In this article, we will examine how these groups were inspired by Latin American *Social Production of Habitat* (SPH) initiatives and the concept of the *common* to develop this model. This form of alternative housing led to a repositioning of Barcelona's housing actors and the elaboration of municipal policies considering housing as "common goods". However, many activist groups consider the common above all a *praxis*, breaking with the policies of the City Council and bringing the common closer to the notion of SPH. In this article, we will question the links between these two notions and their applications in Barcelona. We will examine how the use, sometimes decontextualized, of these concepts by some entities generates conflict and demonstrates an attempt to reappropriate these notions to support neoliberal values. Thus, we will see how some cooperative housing projects allow for the (re)politicization of the notions of *common* and *SPH*, outlining a form of housing *communalization*.

Keywords

Cooperative housing; use value; commons; Social Production of Habitat (SPH); communalization; reterritorialization

Introduction

Our goal is the socialization of all the goods of the earth.
By what procedures? By those that are required by the circumstances,
without straying from that road that we have traced for ourselves in advance.
—Salvador Seguí, 1919

The 2008 housing crisis highlighted the weaknesses of the Spanish housing model. Based on the strong promotion of private property, this model shows a major orientation towards speculation and an inability to house inhabitants in decent conditions. However, faced with the great difficulty of accessing housing, social movements have developed innovative and solidarity-based proposals. Since the housing bubble burst, the number of housing cooperative projects in cession of use has increased in Catalonia, particularly in Barcelona. Based on the principle of collective property, these alternative housing projects are positioned as antispeculative affordable housing solutions and as transformative urban planning projects encouraging us to rethink the production of the city by placing the collective of inhabitants at the center of the process. To promote the housing model of cession of use (MCU), the activist groups were inspired by projects in other European and Latin American countries and mobilized the Latin American concept of *Social Production of Habitat* (SPH) as well as the concept of the *common*, which resurfaced recently in Spain. With the victory of *Barcelona en Comú* (*Barcelona in Common*) citizens' candidacy in the municipal elections of 2015, the city of Barcelona became the Spanish reference for this type of housing. In fact, although the cooperative projects in cession of use were created several years before the constitution of this candidacy, after the victory in 2015, the new City Council showed great interest in these alternative housing projects. In 2016, it launched a municipal contest to promote cooperative housing projects in cession of use and affirmed its willingness to understand housing as "common goods". However, this reappropriation of the MCU by the City Council generated conflicts with the activist groups that initially promoted it. Indeed, by positioning itself as a central actor in the governance of the cooperative housing sector, the City Council proposed a different model of housing that conflicts with a series of values defended by social movements, particularly with regard to their conception of the notion of the *common*.

In this article, we will examine how and why activist groups in Barcelona mobilized these different concepts of *SPH* and the *common* and how they articulated them to develop their cooperative housing projects. What were the consequences of the development of this MCU by activist groups and its recent reappropriation by the Barcelona City Council? Could references to the notions of *SPH* and the *common* be a disguised way of further privatizing the housing sector by integrating more private actors? How can the emancipatory aspect of these cooperative housing projects be guaranteed to prevent their recuperation by private capitalist actors?

We will approach the notion of the *common* from the angle proposed by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2014), that is, as "*the political principle of a co-obligation for all those who are engaged in the same activity*", a co-obligation that is based only on participation in the same action (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 23). Geographer Simon Springer joined this position by stating that the commons are rooted in notions of cooperation and reciprocity that "are based on mutual exchange, collective interest and the sharing of usufruct" (Springer, 2018, p. 24). He further politicized the question by bringing the notion of the *commons* closer to anarchist Pierre Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid (Kropotkin, 1906; Springer, 2018). Thus, according to Springer, "*the possibility of holding something 'in common' implies a recognition of reciprocity and cooperation [...]. The commons, therefore, is always a geographical manifestation of mutual aid*" (Springer, 2018, p. 22). The author thus underlines the importance of the link between the commons and the interwoven relational links among individuals who help each other and brings this idea closer to the "praxis" of anarchist thought, uniting theory and practice (Springer,

2018). Like Springer, Dardot and Laval assert that the concept of the common is a way of acting, a true “*instituting praxis*”. Thus,

if “commune” is the name of local political self-government and “commons” is the name of objects of a very diverse nature cared for by individuals’ collective activity, “common” is properly the name of the principle that animates this activity and which at the same time presides over the construction of this form of self-government. (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 19-20)

Thus, this principle of the *common* differs from the notion of *common goods* developed by Ostrom and the proponents of the standard economic approach dependent on a certain economic naturalism. However, Dardot and Laval go further by stating that the concept of the *common* requires a break with the right of ownership, which must be opposed by the right of use. This idea of the right of use is mobilized by the Barcelona activist groups fighting for the right to housing through their defense of *cession of use*. For them, the notion of “use value” developed by Henri Lefebvre (1968) is a way of turning their backs on the concept of housing as “exchange value” (ibid.). In fact, in a housing cooperative project in cession of use, the cooperative entity is the owner of the building, and each household obtains the right to use one apartment. Therefore, the inhabitants do not have exclusive ownership of their home and cannot sell it, which takes it out of the market and speculation, calling into question the very concept of private property.

Often, these cooperative projects in cession of use are self-produced by their future inhabitants, which refers to the notion of *SPH*. This notion, widely used in Latin America since 1970, can be interpreted in various ways. According to Enrique Ortiz, a reference on the subject, the field of SPH includes the processes of habitat and housing production under the control of self-producers and nonprofit social actors (including cooperatives, associations, NGOs and charitable institutions) in which housing and habitat are considered to be a process, a social and cultural product, and not commodities or objects of exchange (Ortiz, 2007). Despite a great variability of definition, the processes of *self-production of habitat* resulting from isolated individual-family action are usually differentiated from the processes of SPH, which is conceived in a planned, directed and controlled way by a social or sociopolitical actor (Rodríguez et al., 2007). SPH also implies a self-managed collective organization that “*distinguishes itself by being explicitly inscribed in a political perspective of transformation of power relations*” with the objective of “*promoting processes of debureaucratization of certain state institutional structures, by transferring capacities to the executing subjects*” (ibid., p. 30-32). Furthermore, SPH should not be confused with *self-built housing*, which refers only to the mode of construction and can be done collectively (mutual aid) – in which case it can be articulated in the processes of SPH – or individually (self-help). Thus, individual-family processes of self-building in popular neighborhoods lack the planning and collective political logic of SPH. Many other processes of popular housing production have been suggested to overcome poor access to housing in Latin America, some of which fall outside market and state regulations (squatting, informal markets, etc.) (Lopes de Souza, 2006; Martín Hernández and Díaz García, 2018; Rolnik, 2018a; Turner et al., 2018; Zibechi, 2007, 2011). This article will, however, focus on the notion of SPH.

There are many similarities between the concepts of *SPH* and the *common*, particularly the notion of process (or praxis) and its relations with self-management and mutual aid practices. However, it is important to keep in mind that the contexts in which these concepts were developed (European for the notion of the *common* and Latin American for that of *SPH*) are very different. In our case, one of the basic differences is the existence of a welfare state in Spain (albeit strongly eroded) and the nonexistence of such a state in Latin America (Lopes de Souza, 2009). This difference is important when developing alternative and collective housing projects. Therefore, this article does not attempt to compare the Latin

American and Barcelona experiences but rather to analyze how the reinterpretation of the concepts of the common and SPH is materializing in Barcelona despite its great differences from Latin American experiences.

This article, based on our thesis work, is based on more than fifty interviews conducted between 2015 and 2019 with various actors (public, associative and militant) in the housing sector in Barcelona and on participant observation work carried out during seminars and workshops organized by these actors¹.

First, we will examine how the housing cooperative projects under collective ownership were constituted in Catalonia and how the activist groups that defend them mobilized the concepts of *SPH* and the *common* for that purpose. We will determine that these projects come both from the reappropriation and reinterpretation of inherited Catalan traditions and from the transfer of ideas or the reinterpretation of exogenous models, referring to the notion of SPH and Latin American projects. However, we will also find that these Latin American references invoked by Barcelona activist groups are maintained above all in the field of communication rather than in actual applications, given the very different realities of these two regions of the world. In the second part, through the case of a pioneering housing cooperative project in Barcelona, we will examine how Barcelona's activist groups consider housing in cession of use *commons* and how they apply the notion of SPH. Finally, we will examine how the recognition of this form of alternative housing by the Barcelona City Council led to the recuperation of this housing model by lucrative actors. We will find that the proposals for the governance of cooperative housing differ according to the actors, their political positioning and their conception of what is *common*, considered to be *goods (object)* or *praxis (process)*, depending on the case. We will conclude with the need for the repoliticization of these concepts and ways of conceiving the city to allow real housing *communalization* in Barcelona.

Housing as the common and the Social Production of Habitat in Catalonia: housing cooperatives in collective property

Before broaching the housing cooperative projects under development in Barcelona, it is important to recall how this form of alternative housing emerged in Catalonia and to present the debates it has generated on the issue of land property.

Housing cooperatives and collective property in Catalonia in the 20th century

The history of housing as a collectively managed "shared object" has a long tradition in Catalonia. It is rooted in the Catalan cooperative movement of the nineteenth century, marked by various ideological influences, from the social doctrine of the church to the anarchism of Piotr Kropotkin to liberal, paternalistic and Marxist ideas (Tatjer, 1998).

In 1914, strongly influenced by the works of the anarchist geographers Eliseo Reclus and Patrick Geddes, the reformist Cebrià de Montoliu published a text that laid the foundations of Catalan housing cooperativism (Masjuan, 2000). In accordance with the proposals of the socialist urbanist Ebenezer

¹ We interviewed some municipal actors in Barcelona (including the city councilor, the housing manager and the cabinet chief of the Barcelona City Council Housing Department), a dozen associative actors specializing in the development of cooperative housing projects, some inhabitants of existing cooperative housing projects and some activist groups supporting the MCU. The duration of the interviews varied between 45 minutes and 3 hours. This fieldwork was carried out between 2015 and 2019 over several short stays and a one-year stay in 2019, allowed by our position as a scientific member of the Casa de Velázquez (Madrid).

Howard – a reference of the English Garden City model and directly influenced by the anarchist geographers Reclus and Kropotkin (Hall and Ward, 1998; Oyón, 2014) – Montoliu criticized private property and developed the concept of the "Cooperative Garden City", proposing a cooperative operation from construction to the daily management of a house through the implementation of a collective property shared by the inhabitants. To fight against land speculation, Montoliu proposed the implementation “*of a municipalism or decentralized self-government that proposes the socialization of real estate and the municipalization of land ownership*” but remained open to other land ownership solutions, such as collectivization (Masjuan, 2000, p. 28 and 120). Strongly influenced by Geddesian ideas, this model articulates a collective self-production of housing, collective property and community-based housing management, demonstrating an initial theoretical link with the current notions of SPH and the *common*. However, despite Montoliu's important work, this path was blocked by the strong promotion of individual private property for workers by the state, the church and the bourgeoisie to weaken the development of revolutionary ideas (Tatjer, 1998).

During the Spanish Social Revolution of 1936, several alternatives for managing urban property were developed, such as the “*syndicalization*” of urban property and housing promoted by the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT), the Spanish confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labor unions, the majority union at that time, whose objective was to fight against the bureaucratic functioning of public administrations through the collective self-management of inhabitants (Cadenas and Fernández, 2018). However, the *Generalitat* (regional government) of the time, supported by statist communists, blocked these self-management experiences in order to maintain government control over land and housing (Roca, 1972). Although it is difficult to clearly assess these measures, the CNT's reluctance to leave the control of land and housing in the hands of the institutions and its proposal of antibureaucratic and collective management of housing by assemblies of inhabitants is reminiscent of the current notion of the *common* (Miró, 2018). However, as a result of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), collective management initiatives were blocked, and cooperatives were hijacked by the regime and distorted from the objectives of the cooperative movement: they were used as housing construction cooperatives, a vector of access to private property (Tatjer, 1998).

From housing rights movements to the return of collective property in Catalonia

At the end of Franco's regime, housing policies were still mainly oriented towards access to private property. The construction of new housing continued to be the spearhead of this policy and of the Spanish economic system (Capel, 2013). The neoliberalization of the housing sector increased, and most public institutions left it in the hands of private actors, mainly banks (López and Rodríguez, 2010 ; Rolnik, 2013). During the 2000s, the formation of the Spanish housing bubble was accompanied by a significant increase in housing prices and the strong financialization of the sector, which led to its *detritorialization*² (Rolnik, 2018a, 2018b). While the administrations and the dominant media deny the existence of this housing bubble, groups of young people – often close to the squatting movement (Martínez López, 2013) – formed to fight for the right to housing. Following an urban criticism tradition that dates back to the last years of Franco's regime with the creation of neighborhood associations and libertarian mobilizations (Castells, 1977), these young groups supported increasing the stock of public social housing, fighting against real estate speculation, the participation of autonomous entities in public decision making, promoting housing cooperativism, etc. (PVD, 2006). Some groups (squatters and libertarians) went further, supporting an autonomous way of building and managing housing “*in*

² The notion of deterritorialization means a “*destruction of social territories, collective identities and traditional value systems*” (Guattari, 1985, p. 129).

common" – neither public-state nor private – sometimes referring to the anarcho-syndicalist movement of the 1930s.

Afterwards, these demands for the right to housing were extended and defended by Catalan associations that acted as intermediaries, creating a relation between activist groups and political leaders to promote a new form of housing based on use value and collective management.

The creation of the model of cession of use: the Latin American influence and the Social Production of Habitat

In 2004, the Catalan association *SostreCívic*, made up of young lawyers and architects, was inspired by the Scandinavian model of cooperative projects in cession of use (*Andel*) established in Northern Europe, and aimed to develop in Catalonia a legal model based on collective property that defended the notion of the *use value* of housing. In its *MCU*, *SostreCívic* incorporates influences from other countries, such as the Uruguayan model of the *Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua* (FUCVAM), one of the most famous references of SPH, which demonstrates a conceptual link between the Catalan MCU and the notion of SPH (Di Virgilio and Rodríguez, 2014). As the Catalan case shows, the creation of the FUCVAM is also linked to many social struggles led by the Uruguayan labor, cooperative and anarchist movements (González, 2013). However, the great differences between the Uruguayan and Catalan contexts lead us to relativize the links between the Catalan MCU and the FUCVAM model. Indeed, this link is limited to the incorporation into the Catalan MCU of a reference to the possibility of the self-construction of housing and collaboration with public administrations to promote the model. These different exogenous references were subjected to a process of reinterpretation and adaptation to the Catalan context by *SostreCívic*, which succeeded in incorporating its model into Catalan legislation after significant lobbying work. However, with the financial crisis of 2008 and the shift to the right of the Catalan government in 2010, public institutions have not mobilized this model, which has been reappropriated by activist groups.

Housing cooperatives in cession of use: between Social Production of Habitat and the commons

During the housing crisis of 2008, the process of deterritorialization of the housing sector intensified, with more than 570,000 foreclosures and at least 250,000 mortgaged families evicted between 2008 and 2014, after which many Spaniards were left without homes, losing their territorial anchorage (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016). In Barcelona, despite the supposedly beneficial effects of the "Barcelona model" developed by left-wing city councils since the 1980s, several authors have attested to the absence of a social housing policy during this period (Delgado, 2007; Ter Minassian, 2013). In 2015, access to housing remained very difficult, and Barcelona's social housing stock represented less than 2% of the total housing stock, with more than 54,000 people waiting for social housing (Miralles Buil, 2018).

To fight against this process of exclusion and to reappropriate the housing sector, several activist groups mobilized the MCU of *SostreCívic* and promoted housing cooperative projects in cession of use. Figure 1 illustrates the implementation of these projects promoted by activist groups as they existed in 2015, although some did not yet have the land needed to carry out their project at that date. It should be noted that most of these groups were located in neighborhoods with high real estate pressure, due mainly to processes of touristification or gentrification (Ter Minassian, 2013)³.

³ Several neighborhoods in which housing cooperative projects are being developed have a Disposable Household Income (DHI) index below the Barcelona average (DHI index of Barcelona = 100) and have suffered a significant increase in housing

Through the example of *La Borda*, a pioneering cooperative project in cession of use, we will see how these projects have materialized based on the notions of the *common* and SPH. This project is based on a struggle of more than thirty years by the inhabitants of La Bordeta neighborhood (Figure 1), who tried to reappropriate the old Can Batlló textile factory.

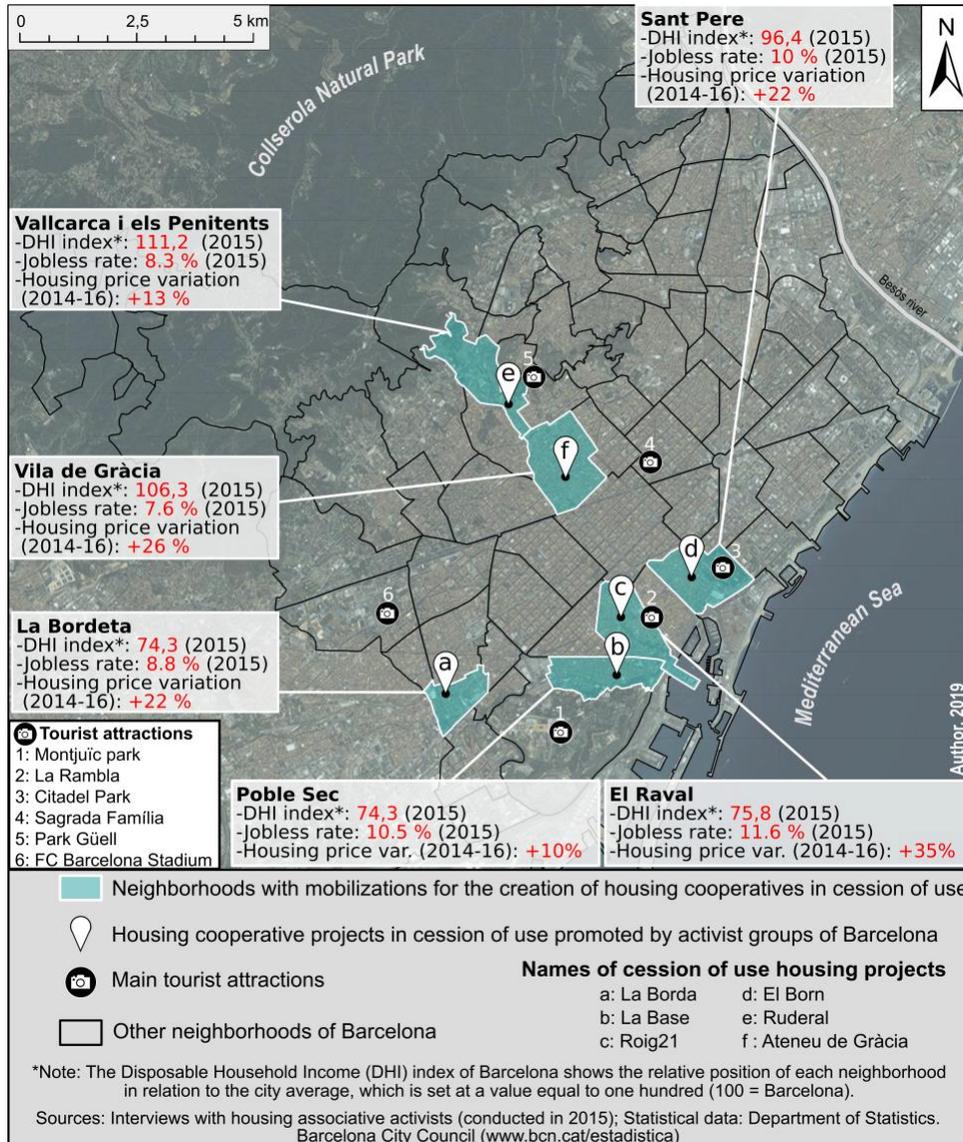


Figure 1: Housing cooperative projects in cession of use promoted by activist groups in Barcelona (May 2015)

The popular reappropriation of the Can Batlló factory: the creation of an urban commons

Partially closed in 1964, the Can Batlló textile factory was converted into various facilities for the neighborhood (green spaces, social housing, associative premises, etc.). Between 1976 and 2006, the

prices between 2014 and 2016, which reflects the increasing difficulty of access to housing for low-income people in these neighborhoods (Figure 1).

factory conversion project greatly evolved, but the works were never started. Tired of this long wait and the lack of consultation on the project, the inhabitants of the neighborhood meet in 2009 on the associative platform "*Can Batlló es pel barri*" (*Can Batlló is for the neighborhood*). Supported by various entities of the neighborhood and the city, this activist group opposed the demolition of part of the factory, mobilizing an argument for the preservation of the historical and symbolic heritage of the neighborhood. After a long struggle against the factory owners (the Barcelona City Council and a real estate group), the platform obtained the cession of a large part of the factory, which it rehabilitated and self-manages to provide equipment and services for the inhabitants of the neighborhood (El Periódico, 2019).

This *urban commons* experience demonstrates a new way of managing neighborhood amenities while maintaining strong autonomy from public and private actors. Indeed, the collective is based on the *direct and active participation* of the inhabitants of the neighborhood (but also of all those interested in the project); it is presented as an act of *self-government* based on the *coparticipation* of all its members and on the collective elaboration of rules. Therefore, we find here all the ingredients of the "*instituting praxis of the common*" according to Dardot and Laval (2014), as evidenced by the activist group's important reflection on the project's collective management model (Miró, 2018).

From the urban commons of Can Batlló to the social production of habitat: the project of La Borda

Faced with the difficulty of housing access in the neighborhood, some members of the platform "*Can Batlló es pel barri*" decided to find a solution to this problem on their own through a housing cooperative project in cession of use called La Borda. After a long negotiation with the City Council, the inhabitants' collective obtained in 2014 a plot of land located near Can Batlló, given by the City Council in a *leasehold* formula for a period of 75 years. The Borda project is a good example of *SPH* in its Catalan materialization. It operates in an "assemblist" way, and all decisions related to the development of the project (architectural and economic issues, internal rules of life, etc.) are made horizontally by the *general assembly* of cooperative members. It is an *SPH* project directed by a neighborhood collective that controls the entire production process, with interdisciplinary technical assistance provided by several neighborhood cooperatives participating in the collective. In the absence of public aid, the inhabitants' collective quickly undertook a *crowdfunding* campaign to finance the construction of the project's 28 social housing units and received financial support from various Spanish and international social and solidarity economy entities (La Borda, 2019). Work began in 2017 and was completed by the end of 2018 (Figure 2).



Figure 2: La Borda housing cooperative in 2019: *"We build housing to build community"* (project slogan). Source: Diego Miralles Buil, March 2019.

In this project, the land remains municipal property, while the cooperative is the owner of the apartments. Thus, this alternative form of housing demonstrates an articulation between public (municipal) ownership of the land and "common management" (community) of the building through a cooperative: a form of *"public-cooperative-community agreement"* (Miró, 2018). Moreover, as the land was ceded by the City Council, the apartments are assigned according to social criteria: all future inhabitants of the cooperative must be registered in the Barcelona social housing applicants registry. The low-income neighborhood residents who participated in the project produced their own residential solution, which follows the SPH concept, as demonstrated by the SPH Europe Award received by La Borda in 2016 (Urbamonde, 2016). Moreover, due to the internal mode of organization of the group (self-management, self-government, horizontality, etc.), the constitution of this project also refers to the notion of the *common* (Dardot and Laval, 2014).

However, the Borda project does not stop there. According to a resident of the cooperative, the idea was to *"expand the Can Batlló [and La Borda] project to make it an infinitely reproducible way of making the city"* (Interview with a member of La Borda, April 2015). For this purpose, the architects' cooperative LaCol, which managed the architectural project of La Borda, published a book on participatory processes in architecture and urbanism to share its experience and help develop similar projects. In this book, the authors refer to the notion of SPH and to the importance of the active participation of collective inhabitants in the urban planning process, particularly for housing (LaCol, 2018). In a second book, coordinated by LaCol and the cooperative La Ciutat Invisible (another supporter of La Borda), the link between the Catalan housing cooperative projects, the Uruguayan FUCVAM housing cooperatives and other SPH reference projects is clearly established (LaCol and La Ciutat Invisible, 2018). However, given the very different realities of these two regions of the world, it is important to relativize the references of Catalan projects to their Latin American counterparts. Indeed, the operating modes, the conditions of development and the types of construction of the Catalan and Uruguayan projects (and, more generally, Latin American SPH projects) are very different and should

not be confused. Finally, rather than actually being applied, these Latin American references are maintained mainly in the field of communication to create a "transatlantic support" system between entities defending self-managed housing cooperatives with the aim of exercising more influence on Catalan institutions and encouraging them to support these alternative housing models (for this purpose, Borda members have invited FUCVAM representatives several times, such as during the *Solidarity Economy Fair of Catalonia* in 2016). The existence of the Barcelona groups that defend housing in cession of use and the strong support they have obtained from Latin American entities such as the FUCVAM as well as from local cooperative entities have forced conventional housing actors to adapt their frameworks of action to integrate these alternative housing forms. Thus, beginning in 2015 – especially after the victory in the municipal elections of the *Barcelona en Comú* citizens' candidacy – many housing actors began to adopt housing cooperative and *common* concepts.

Changing scale: towards a new governance of habitat as a common (good)?

With *Barcelona en Comú*'s victory in the municipal elections of 2015, the scale of the promotion and management of housing projects in cession of use is changing. However, the appropriation of this model by conventional housing actors may endanger the emancipatory aspect of housing cooperatives.

Barcelona municipality, housing as common goods and cohousing: first diversion

Like the mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau – cofounder and former spokeswoman of the Platform for Mortgage Affected People (PAH) – many members of the Barcelona council elected in 2015 come from activist groups for the right to housing. Since its creation, this municipal team has aimed to develop a social rental stock and support the MCU. Imitating the broad notion of *cohousing*, the City Council has developed the notion of *cohabitatge* (cohousing) based on the idea of community housing and bringing together various types of tenure, such as cession of use as well as forms of co-ownership, as an approach to the notion of *participative* or *collaborative housing* (Miralles Buil, 2017). With "*cohabitatge*", the City Council wants to contribute to a change in the culture of the inhabitants and housing actors of Barcelona to reorient their practices towards the promotion of affordable and cooperative housing, defending housing as *municipal common goods* and a fundamental right (Interview with V. Valiño, cabinet chief of the Housing Department of Barcelona City Council, November 2016).

As demonstrated by the City Council's political program and several articles published by council members, several housing initiatives led by the Barcelona City Council have referred to the notion of common goods based on the concept developed by Ostrom (Barcelona en Comú, 2015; El Periódico, 2016). Thus, the City Council tries to influence the housing market by encouraging conventional actors to consider housing as common goods and not a commodity. In its *Barcelona Right to Housing Plan 2016-2025*, the City Council plans to build 533 *cohousing* apartments, representing 2.8% of the 18,989 new housing units planned for 2025.

To achieve this goal, the City Council is promoting a public invitation to tender in 2016 for the allocation of seven plots of municipal land to *cohousing* projects built by cooperatives. As with La Borda project, the winning projects will be granted a municipal plot of land with a 75-year *leasehold* for the construction of a social housing cooperative. At first sight, in accordance with the demands of the activist groups, the council has mobilized this formula to counter speculation and gentrification (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2017). However, following the broad concept of *cohabitatge*, this public contest was not reserved for antispeculative projects of cession of use but was also open to projects of housing cooperatives promoting access to private property (the rules of the public contest authorize "horizontal divisions" of the projects, allowing the inhabitants to have access to exclusive private housing). After a three-month project preparation period, the City Council chose the winning groups in May 2017

following several set criteria, such as the social interaction of the project with the neighborhood, its architectural and technical quality, and the solvency of the project and of the future inhabitants.

Although they recognize the first step taken by the municipal council, the activist groups that promoted the MCU are critical of this public contest for several reasons. First, the groups had only three months to elaborate a project combining community, economic, administrative and architectural issues, which is a very short period (in comparison, La Borda project was created in more than three years). Second, contrary to the City Council's statement, most of the plots are located not in neighborhoods subject to strong real estate pressure but on the periphery of Barcelona (Figure 3). When asked about this issue, City Council officials acknowledged that they had chosen the sites according to strictly economic criteria: only those sites that were difficult for the Barcelona public housing company to valorize (sloping sites or sites that were too small to be profitable for the municipal company) were selected for the public contest. Finally, it is worth noting the rigidity of the selection criteria – especially in the economic and architectural (energy) fields – as well as the lack of public financial support. This cohousing public contest was aimed at a middle-class population with high cultural capital and will evict a large part of the working-class population from the neighborhoods where the land is located (and for which the DHI index remains low; see Figure 3). For this reason, according to some activist groups, this cohousing public contest could encourage gentrification processes in peripheral neighborhoods.

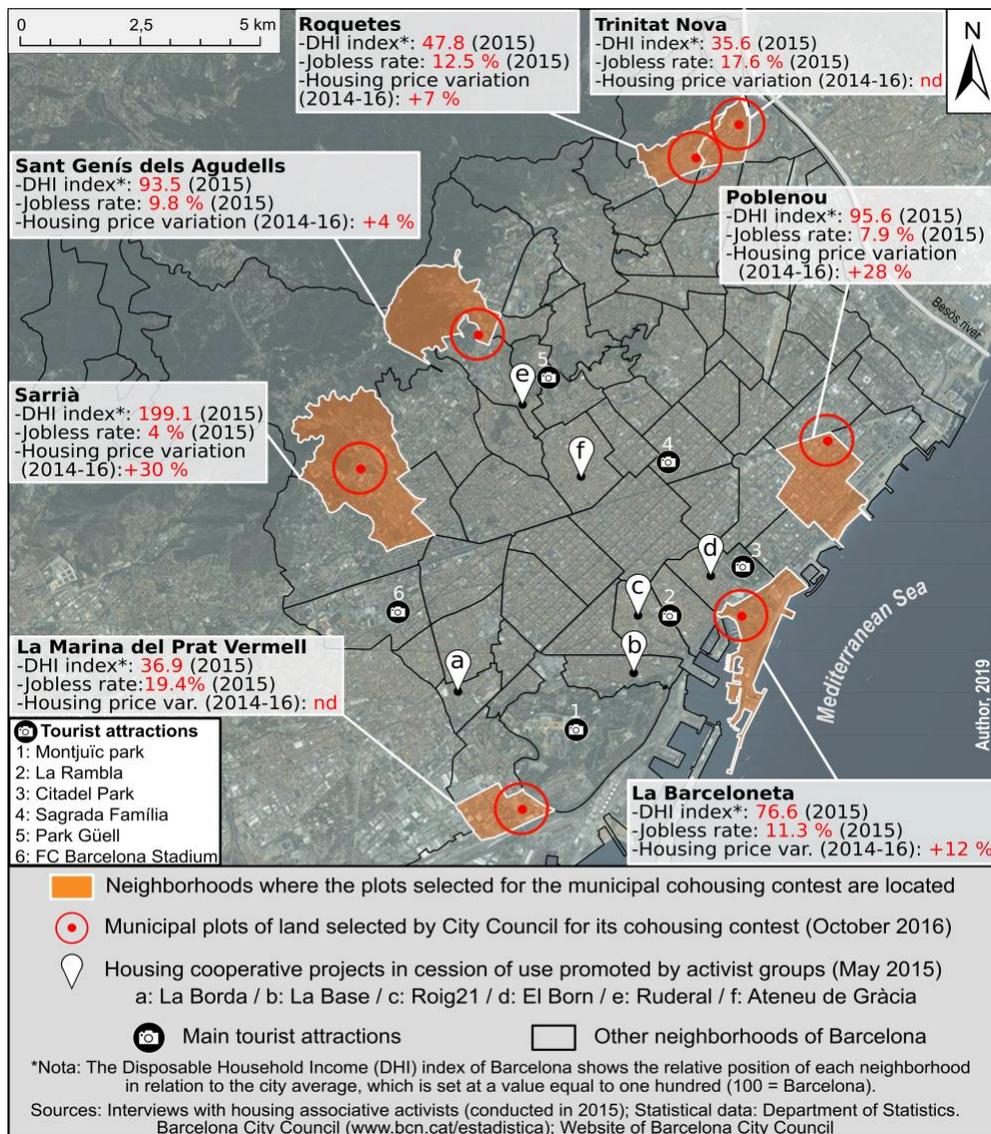


Figure 3: The plots of land of the cohousing public contest do not fit with the demands of the activist groups.

Thus, with this public contest, while officially trying to satisfy the demands of the activist groups, the municipality in a certain way hijacked the cession of use model to use it as a vector of social mixing in working-class neighborhoods and to increase its social stock at a low cost (La Directa, 2017). Additionally, according to the different groups interviewed, the lack of transparency of this public contest, in particular the lack of consultation with the associative groups in the creation of the contest rules and the lack of clarity in the selection of the winning projects, raises doubts. On the other hand, in our interviews, we detected a certain distrust on the part of municipal housing managers towards the activist groups and a desire on the part of the City Council to maintain maximum control over the public contest rules and the management of the municipal housing stock of Barcelona. Therefore, while it directly references the project of La Borda, the City Council’s cohousing contest does not correspond to the criteria of SPH projects because the collective inhabitants do not truly control the modes of production of the housing projects. They control (relatively) only the architectural design of the project

and the future day-to-day management, but for everything else, they are subject to the contest rules established by the City Council without consultation with the activist groups. As shown in Table 1, the cohousing projects promoted by the Barcelona City Council are *housing cooperative coproduction* projects in which the inhabitants have relative participation, but these projects do not coincide with the notion of SPH.

This municipal reluctance to share the production, ownership and management of municipal projects with self-managed groups is a major obstacle for the development of urban governance of housing in an SPH and the *common* conception. “*It's like promoting housing cooperatives for the people but without the people*” concluded one activist (Interview with a cooperative activist, July 2017, Barcelona).

Table 1: Synthetic differences between the original model of cession of use and the concept of *cohabitatge*

	HOUSING COOPERATIVE IN CESSION OF USE (LA BORDA)	COHABITATGE (BARCELONA CITY COUNCIL)
TYPE OF PROPERTY	Collective property (antispeculative)	Collective property or private property (horizontal division possible)
HOUSING CONCEPTION	Use value, process (praxis)	Use value and exchange value (by allowing access to private property)
CONTROL OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS	Control by the collective inhabitants	Control by the City Council (criteria for access, construction, etc.); relative control by the inhabitants (within the limits of the public contest)
TYPE OF PRODUCTION PROCESS	SPH, the <i>common</i>	Participatory coproduction
OBJECTIVES OF THE FORMULA	Fight against gentrification, touristification and speculation.	Promote social mixing in popular neighborhoods, "revitalize" the associative life of the neighborhoods.
COMMENTS	The lack of public aid and the difficulties of access to plot make the development of these projects difficult.	The extreme rigidity of the competition criteria blocks access for the popular classes. The collective inhabitants have only limited control of the project.

The dangers of the City Council's reappropriation of the cession of use model and the notion of the *common* do not stop there. Indeed, with this municipal contest and more generally with its desire to integrate private actors into the constitution of affordable housing stock seen as *common goods*, the City Council has created a framework conducive to the competition of housing cooperatives.

Common, participation and irruption of the competitive society: second diversion

First, the irruption of the *competitive society* is felt in the militant housing cooperative projects themselves. In fact, the operation by invitation to tender (contest) and the small number of plots of land chosen by the City Council put the groups wishing to develop cohousing projects in competition with each other, which could have caused conflicts among them and destabilized some neighborhood community networks. Moreover, the criteria of the public contest required that the future inhabitants actively participate in the development of the project. Nevertheless, following Foucauldian reasoning, geographer Xavier Desjardins affirmed that “*the requirement of participation and responsibility of the inhabitants*” is a central point of the neoliberalization of social housing policies and a means of controlling the inhabitants and making them incorporate new conduct norms (Desjardins, 2008). The Barcelona cohousing municipal contest is representative of the promotion of frameworks conducive to neoliberal competition. Indeed, this contest “*requires [the future inhabitants] to comply with the principles of responsibility or entrepreneurship, and therefore to act according to the principles of a competitive society*” (Desjardins, 2008, par. 2). Following this Foucauldian reasoning, in exchange for the possibility of access to a plot of municipal land for a cohousing project, the City Council controls the profile of the future inhabitants through a series of criteria (associative experiences, good economic management capacities, etc.). However, according to Desjardins, “*the injunction to responsibility leads those who do not have all the possibilities of fully exercising it to have to assume as a result of their own fact situations which, for the most part, escape them*” (Desjardins, 2008, par. 21). This creates a high level of inequality and puts residents who need affordable housing in competition with each other.

However, the emergence of housing cooperatives in cession of use in the *competitive society* does not stop there. Indeed, the semantic vagueness of the notion of “*cohabitatge*” (cohousing) created by the City Council – which sought to make the cession of use model more accessible to conventional housing actors – laid the groundwork for a recuperation of the notion of the *common* and housing cooperatives by profit-making actors. Thus, this new way of *cohabitatge* (cohousing) generated first, the creation of several entities seeking to specialize in consulting on cohousing projects and second, a repositioning of traditional actors in the Barcelona real estate sector trying to appropriate this new form of access to housing. Some of these actors in the real estate sector (such as several housing construction cooperatives in private property) were contacted directly by the City Council for possible participation in its municipal cohousing contest. Moreover, the council's willingness to increase the “coresponsibility” of private actors by pressuring them to admit the concept of housing as *common goods* led to a massive recuperation of this notion and the terminology of neighborhood groups by commercial and speculative actors (Miralles Buil, 2018). Finally, many commercial companies follow the *cohabitatge* trend by proposing highly speculative community housing formulas, as shown by some projects that hide behind the general term of *cohousing* to provide housing only in condominiums (co-ownership) allowing access to private property at a low cost (with collective spaces or services) without questioning the exclusive private ownership of housing. This can also be seen in the “*coliving*” projects that have increased significantly in Barcelona since 2016. This way of sharing housing not out of necessity but for “lifestyle” reasons is designed for upper-middle-class tenants who are looking for other forms of coexistence “*where what is sold is not the house, but ‘the experience’ of living in community and without ties to the property*” (LaCol and La Ciutat Invisible, 2018, p. 103). Frequently promoted by SOCIMIs (a Spanish form of *real estate investment trust* (REIT) that manages highly profitable and speculative real estate assets), this type of housing feeds on the difficulties of housing access for the population to justify the development of

shared-apartment projects with shared coworking spaces for young workers and hides the real economic reasons for most young people to share housing. *Coliving* is a very profitable business for investors and speculators around the world and sometimes receive the direct support of Spanish public administrations (COPE, 2018). Although they are sometimes mistakenly compared to housing cooperatives in cession of use, these *coliving* projects are in fact related to the notion of “*platform capitalism*” (Dardot and Laval, 2014; Miró, 2018). Like platforms such as Airbnb, which monetize the notion of lodging, these projects are contrary to the notions of SPH and the *common* by their economic and speculative nature, in contrast to the housing cooperatives in cession of use promoted by activist groups. This conceptual difference leads to a misunderstanding of the notion of the *common* and dilutes it into neoliberal ideas: the reference to the notion of the *common* or more broadly “*participation*” then becomes a way of concealing the implementation of public-private collaborations with high speculative and competitive value. This mix between *urban commons* projects led by activist groups and neoliberal projects bringing together various private actors has been directly fed by the Barcelona City Council through various municipal councilors who defend public-private collaboration in the field of housing (Miralles Buil, 2019).

Thus, by opening housing project opportunities to the conventional market through the idea of *cohabitatge* (cohousing), the cession of use model is integrated into a new market that remains a form of commercialization of this *municipal common goods* defended by the Barcelona City Council. The council tries to articulate the promotion of cohousing and public-private collaboration while maintaining strong public control over the housing market without truly sharing this control with associative and activist groups. This City Council position is strongly criticized by the activist groups that promote cession of use.

From the participation of inhabitants to the self-government of the common

Faced with the City Council's housing governance proposal, several activist groups are proposing alternative habitat management. According to them, strict public control of housing does not protect it from future privatization, since nothing prevents a future City Council from deciding to sell it, as has been done in the past (López and Rodríguez, 2010). These activist groups defend the totally *common* management of housing, with control and management to be carried out by autonomous structures managed by the inhabitants themselves (with or without the participation of public actors).

This is, for example, the case of *La Dinamo*, a foundation created in 2016 following the cooperative La Borda to promote housing cooperatives in cession of use in Catalonia that proposes a method of access to housing cooperatives based on *cooperative-community agreement*, a more flexible and affordable approach than the City Council's cohousing contest (La Dinamo, 2019). *La Dinamo* and other activist groups criticize the City Council's cohousing contest but do not reject dialogue with the council. Close to the notion of “*grassroots urban planning*” developed by Brazilian left-libertarian geographer Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2006), these activist groups defend the implementation of a permanent process of “pressure negotiation” by autonomous social movements with public actors to win “*more or less modest tactical victories here and now*” (Lopes de Souza, 2006, p. 330). Thus, these activist groups try to promote “*public-cooperative-community planning*”, as seen in the SPH project of La Borda (Miró, 2018), to integrate the public sector into a truly antispeculative and affordable process of *social coproduction of habitat*, controlled by the activist groups and supported by the City Council.

However, several activist groups go beyond these local housing cooperative projects and try to articulate the local scale (the neighborhood) and regional scale by developing a network of housing cooperatives in cession of use projects. The idea is ultimately to develop a true federation of projects in cession of use at the Catalan scale in order to have a greater impact on the housing sector and expand the development of this alternative model. This federative system gives each project a high degree of

autonomy and should eventually allow a certain degree of residential mobility. To this end, and to fight against competition between activist groups for access to land, these activist groups recently created a network of the cooperative and transformative housing sector (the *Sectorial d'Habitatge Cooperatiu i Transformador*). It is based on the *Catalan Solidarity Economy Network – Xarxa d'Economia Solidària* (XES), which aims to overcome public institution rigidity and to develop localized agreements with municipalities (for example, to obtain land). This *cooperative and transformative housing network* is intended to develop a stable and sustainable MCU in order to influence public policies, for example, to improve future contests promoted by public actors or to help activist groups support each other in the search for plots of land. The development of "criteria pillars" such as nonspeculation, self-management and collective ownership is intended to help distinguish housing cooperative projects that truly defend the original antispeculative cession of use model from other less rigorous housing projects that only take advantage of the "trend" of *cohabitatge* promoted by the Barcelona City Council. Although the aim of the integration of this housing cooperative network into the XES is to guarantee the ethical rigor of the projects, Ivan Miró reminded us that the defense of the *commons* in the social and solidarity economy is also a daily struggle to preserve them from “*private interests that sometimes manifest themselves in some Social and Solidarity Economy enterprises*” (Miró, 2018, p. 168).

Thus, these activist groups support a new form of housing governance based on the needs and wishes of the inhabitants and not on the technocratic and bureaucratic tools of public administrations. They refute the mere episodic participation of the inhabitants in a housing policy controlled by the City Council and support housing self-government at the communal level and federated at the regional level, that is, a form of housing “communalization”.

Discussion and conclusions: towards housing communalization in Barcelona

With the housing policies developed by the Barcelona City Council and its desire to control the municipal housing stock, leaving little power of action to activist groups, in practice, the council does not support *SPH* from a *common* perspective. With its municipal cohousing contest, the City Council hijacked the original cession of use model, converted it into a vector of social mixing in working-class peripheral neighborhoods and opened this alternative housing model to neoliberal competition. With the demanding criteria of the contest and the absence of public aid allowing access to this type of housing to a low-income population, the local council used this means to model solvency demands that are prone to a progressive learning of responsibility, all from a clearly neoliberal position (Desjardins, 2008). In this case, particular attention to the knowledge and power asymmetries between actors highlights the lack of dialogue and horizontality of the municipal contest.

In opposition to the neoliberal public-private collaboration supported by the Barcelona City Council, several Barcelona activist groups have been inspired by and formed connections to Latin American *SPH* projects (such as the FUCVAM) to develop self-managed housing cooperatives in cession of use. La Borda project is a good example of this desire and shows how the *SPH* process is perfectly integrated into the production of *urban commons* practices, as in the case of the Can Batlló project. These Barcelona *SPH* projects differ in many ways from their Latin American counterparts and cannot be easily compared (due to the widely differing urban, political and economic contexts), but both struggle to propose nonalienated housing production based on self-management and collective struggle.

To this end, Barcelona's activist groups support *public-cooperative-community planning* and promote a form of *housing communalization* (Miró, 2018). This communalization process, currently underway in Barcelona, goes beyond simple housing municipalization (Bookchin, 2007). It corresponds to housing management on a communal scale – the basic scale of the political commons, according to Dardot and Laval (2014) – and brings together user-inhabitants, activist groups, cooperative building

(nonprofit) entities, and eventually local public actors (such as the City Council) if they accept their role. Thus, according to the *common* and *SPH* logic, communalization corresponds to the *social coproduction of habitat and housing comanagement* by the inhabitants with the support of nonprofit organizations. According to Ivan Miró, (re)municipalization, cooperativization and communal management are part of this broader process of communalization in the sense that they allow, each at its own scale, diverse forms of pooling ("*commoning*") of the territory by the inhabitants themselves (Miró, 2018). In this process, the participation of the City Council (or public actors in general) can accelerate the process but is not indispensable. Indeed, if public actors are hostile to this process of housing recuperation by inhabitants, it would be possible, for example, to create communal housing stock without the help of the City Council and entirely managed by cooperatives (according to *common* and *SPH* values). To participate in the communalization process, the public institution must accept sharing housing control with horizontal, self-managed and autonomous nonprofit institutions, which is not yet the case in Barcelona despite some occasional agreements in this direction.

For this communalization process to work properly, it is necessary for all the actors involved to respect the horizontality of internal power relations and equality among actors and block all forms of domination, thus excluding speculative actors focused on profit. As Ivan Miró pointed out, communalization is a broad process of "*production and social appropriation of urban processes*" that goes against the private accumulation of capital (Bookchin, 2007; Miro, 2018, p. 213). At a time when many housing projects take advantage of the *common* and participation concepts to conceal their capitalist positions, it is essential to pay special attention to the domination processes and asymmetries of power present in these projects. This would allow the identification of internal processes of co-optation (by public and private actors), exploitation, coercion, exclusion and hierarchization that can also occur in *SPH* and *commons* projects (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014 ; Lopes de Souza, 2006 ; Ortíz, 2007). It would thus be possible to differentiate neoliberal housing projects – often simple public-private partnerships in which control of the project remains in the hands of dominant private sector or public actors – from true *SPH* processes with a *common* perspective. Thus, to transform public policies into *communal policies* led by inhabitant groups, a (re)politicization of the *common* and *SPH* notions seems necessary. It is in this sense that George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici spoke of "*anti-capitalist commons*" (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). In contrast to Ostrom, who viewed the commons as a "third way" between the state and the market, Caffentzis and Federici argued that anticapitalist commons "*are not pathways to capitalism with a human face*" but rather are vectors towards "*an alternative to capitalism [...] for the creation of an egalitarian and cooperative society*", with the conditions of reproduction of life at the center (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014, p. 100). Several authors have supported this idea, such as Springer, who (re)places the commons in the anarchism field. He repoliticizes the notion by linking it directly to Kropotkin's mutual aid concept, thus paving the way for a relational interpretation of the *commons*, a vector of collective and individual sociospatial emancipation "*here and now*" (Springer, 2018).

It seems that several activist groups are trying to put this approach into practice today in Barcelona. Although the number of projects already built is limited, there is currently a surge of cession of use projects in the Catalan capital. Through cooperative-community agreements, with or without the support of public actors, these activist groups are laying the groundwork for housing communalization that adheres to the *anticapitalist commons* idea, and La Borda project is the first stone.

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